

OUR GOAL:
Provide stable, nurturing, and permanent placements for children who are placed into out-of-home care

In 1999, a fifteen-year-old boy and five-year-old twin girls first came to the attention of the Children's Administration (CA) when neighbors and school teachers reported unsanitary living conditions in their home, lack of supervision and severe neglect.

While those reporting the conditions had legitimate concerns, the allegations failed to meet legal criteria to allow CA to intervene. Finally in 2001, police raided the home, which housed a methamphetamine lab, and all of the children were placed into foster care.

Their mother, struggling with her addiction, visited her children weekly while awaiting a bed at a local substance abuse treatment facility. It was clear during these visitations that the older brother was accustomed to caring for his little sisters as it was he, and not their mother, who provided supervision and redirected the girls if they were acting up. The mother explained to her children that she was sick and was waiting for room at a special hospital where she could get well.

The mom eventually gained admission into a treatment facility and struggled for quite awhile. Initially her compliance with CA was marginal and, despite her own recovery, she still interacted with known "users" who posed a risk to the children.

The mother finished in-patient treatment, completed a drug court program, attended parenting classes, and agreed to every intervention recommended by CA. At her visitations with the children she was described as "loving, caring and active" with her children.

Family Preservation Services and Hands-on-Parenting services were introduced into the home and the FPS specialist assisted the mom in securing a new residence for the youngest children and herself. Her son had already reached age 18 and was living on his own.

The court granted an in-home dependency and the girls went home with safeguards in place. At one point the mom was known to be associating with an unsafe person and the girls were removed from the home briefly. The judge determined that this was a single act of poor judgment and did not represent a pattern of poor parenting.

At her visitations with the children she was described as "loving, caring and active" with her children.

In Fiscal Year 2004, after having complied with all aspects of her treatment and reunification and safety planning, the mom received full custody of her children. She had attained two years of continuous sobriety, evidenced by clean drug screens and ongoing attendance at aftercare. She had graduated from all of her programs and was nearing completion of a GED program.

All health and safety visits revealed a clean and organized home, a mother who was far more skilled at parenting her children and two little girls who were delighted to be back at home with their mom.



The Children's Administration recognizes that removing children from their families of origin, no matter how troubled, is a painful experience. Multiple placement moves can further traumatize children, which is counter to the administration's goal to ensure safety and stability.

Families have been faced with increasingly difficult challenges over the past decade. An unstable economy, rising unemployment, and the methamphetamine epidemic have all impacted the ability of certain families to care for their children. These factors may be related to the recent increase in the number of children entering out-of-home care.

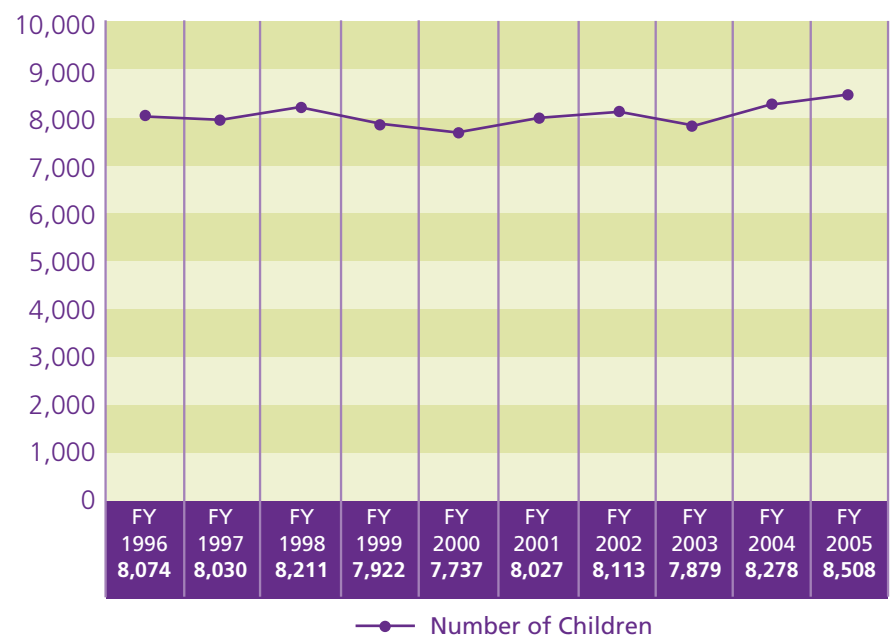
The Children's Administration continuously works to provide adequate support to children in out-of-home care and to their caregivers, and to provide permanent plans for children that assure safety and prioritize child well-being.

The administration maintains permanency objectives including: increase permanency for children in out-of-home care; decrease length of stay without increasing re-entry; increase stability for children in out-of-home care; decrease over-representation of minority children in care; and increase relative placements and preserve connections with parents, siblings, and other significant people.

In an effort to monitor the administration's progress regarding these objectives, the following performance measures are utilized:

- Children reunified with their families within 12 months of placement
- Children adopted within 24 months of placement
- Children placed in guardianships
- Length of stay for children in care
- Children re-entering care
- Children with no more than two placements
- Minority children in care longer than two years
- Children placed with relatives

Children Cared for in Out-of-Home Placement*



* Count of children in out-of-home care on the last day of the fiscal year, without a permanent plan completed, who remain in care for more than 60 days, excluding children in legal custody of Tribes or private agencies.

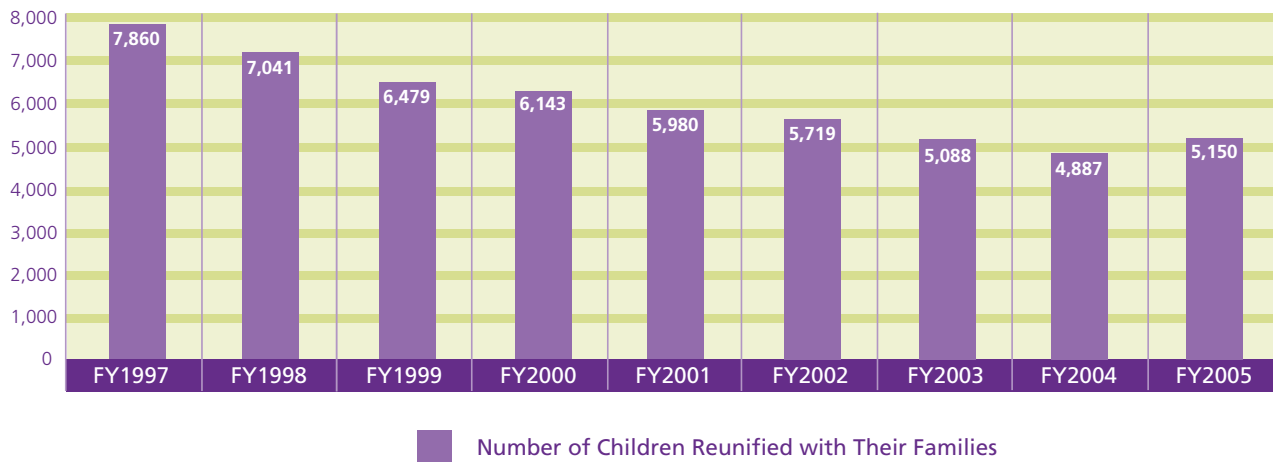
OBJECTIVE Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care
MEASURED BY Children returned to their parents (reunified)

Placing children in permanent homes is a priority of the Children's Administration, second only to ensuring the safety of vulnerable children. Whenever it is safe and in the best interest of the child or children involved, the Children's Administration seeks family reunification as the preferred permanency option.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy studied the factors that reduce family reunifications in Washington State prior to FY2004 and concluded that "most of the reduction has occurred because the number of out-of-home placements has dropped, not because of any change in the rate of reunification." According to the study, "the drop in out-of-home placements accounts for 86 percent of the decline in reunifications. The decline in placements was primarily among a lower-risk population for whom no dependency case was filed. Nearly all children in such placements reunify with families."¹

Over the course of the nine year period reported, reunifications declined every year until Fiscal Year 2005, when the administration experienced an increase in reunification. This increase is most likely associated with the increase in the total number of children in out-of-home care.

Children Reunified*



* Children placed in out-of-home care who were reunified with their parents during the fiscal year.

¹ Excerpted from Washington State Institute for Public Policy, May 2004, [Decline in Washington's Family Reunifications: What Influenced This Trend?](#) Document Number 04-04-3901 //www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/04-05-3901.pdf

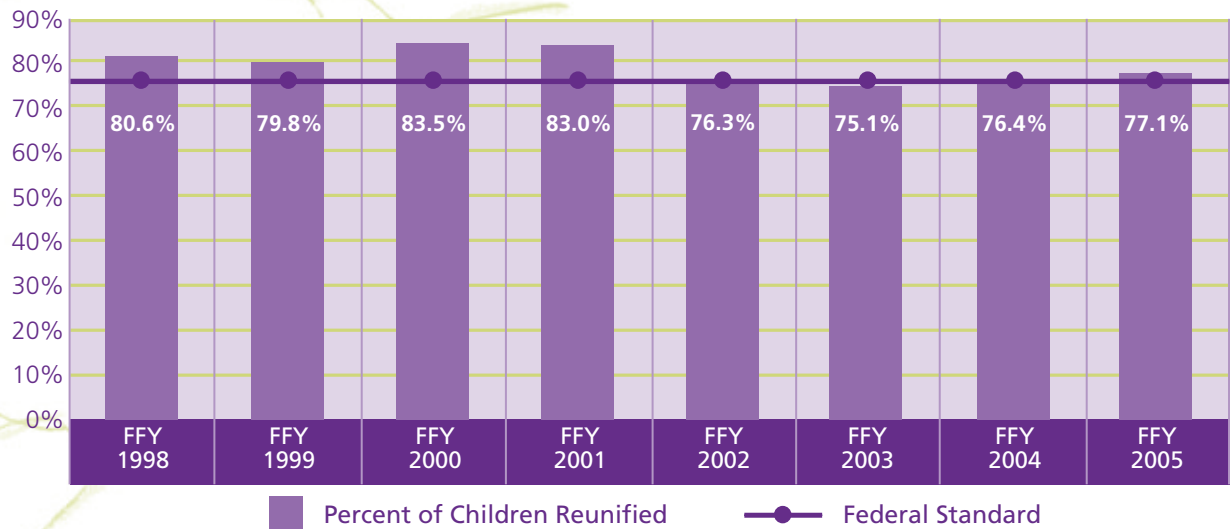
OBJECTIVE Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care
MEASURED BY Children reunified within 12 months of placement

Whenever it is safe and in the best interest of the child, the administration works to reunify children with their families of origin, following safety assessment and planning and thorough reunification planning.

The federal standard requires that at least 76.2 percent of children for whom reunification is the best permanent outcome, will be reunified within 12 months of out-of-home placement.

Washington State has historically done well with reference to this measure having met the standard for every year of the eight year period documented.

Reunification Within 12 Months of Placement*



"Kelcy & Shyiel my sisters,
 and Zane (myself). We are
 tubing at the lake. My foster
 dad's boat is blue."

—Zane, Age 7

Zane lives with a foster family

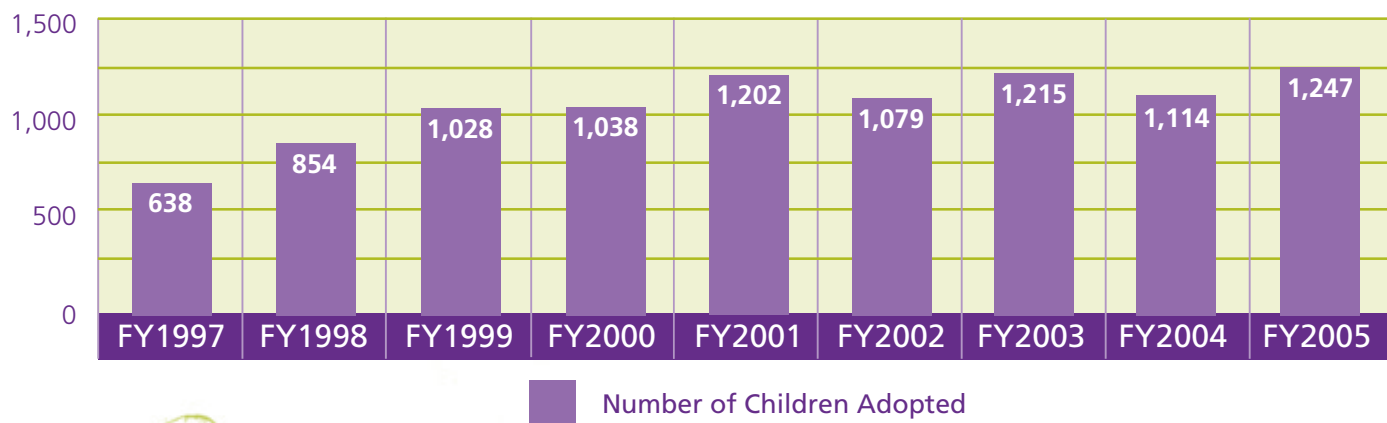
* Percent of children reunified with their parents within 12 months of placement into out-of-home care. Based upon federal fiscal year as reported to the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). The federal standard is 76.2 percent or higher.

OBJECTIVE Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care
MEASURED BY Children adopted

Children want a “real home.” They want to know that the people who they call parents will love them unconditionally, regardless of the difficulties in their past or their problems.

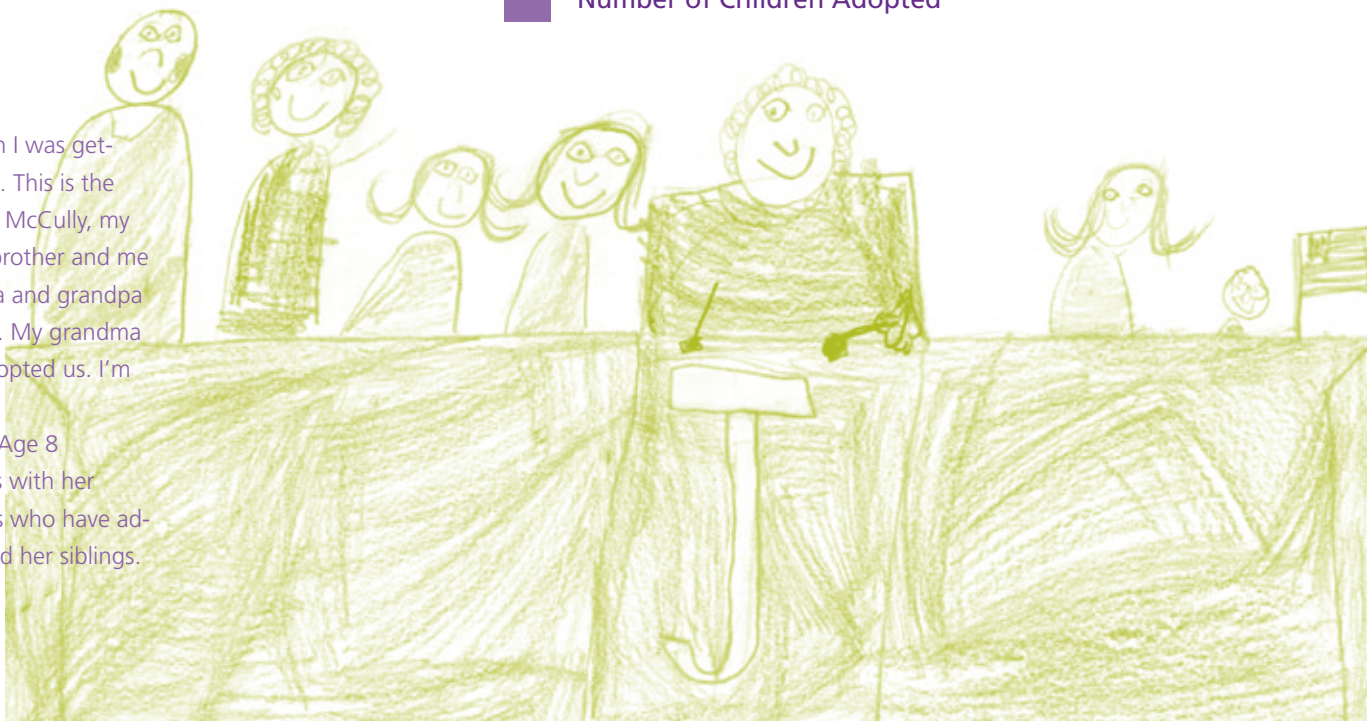
The Children’s Administration seeks caring, supportive families who are willing to open their hearts and homes to children who have may have been through a great deal of difficulty in their young lives. The number of adoptions in Washington State has nearly doubled over the course of the nine year period reported, with more than 9,400 children gaining families and homes they could call their own. In Fiscal Year 2005, more children than ever, a total of 1,247, were the beneficiaries of finalized adoptions.

Children Adopted*



“This is when I was getting adopted. This is the Honor Judge McCully, my two sisters, brother and me and grandma and grandpa on 12-23-04. My grandma and papa adopted us. I’m thankful.”

— Michelle, Age 8
 Michelle lives with her grandparents who have adopted her and her siblings.



*The number of children placed in out-of-home care with an accomplished permanent plan of adoption. This measure is reported as point in time at the end of the indicated fiscal year, thus adoption data may vary over time.

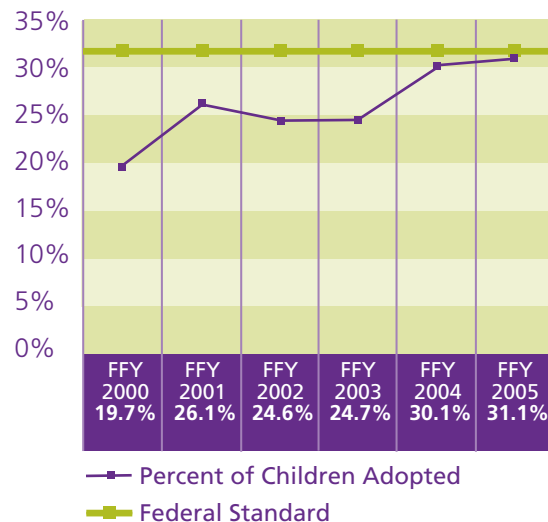
OBJECTIVE Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care
MEASURED BY Children adopted within 24 months of placement

The longer a child remains in out-of-home placement, the less likely it is that the administration will be able to secure a permanent home for that child.

It is important that children for whom reunification is not possible and parental rights have been terminated are placed in adoptive homes as quickly as possible. This permanency is necessary to allow for appropriate attachment between parents and child and to restore a sense of normalcy to the child's life.

The federal practice standard for timely adoptions is that at least 32 percent of children for whom adoption is the identified outcome will be adopted within 24 months of placement into out-of-home care. Washington State has made progress toward this target and in the most recent fiscal year nearly met the federal standard.

Children Adopted Within 24 Months of Placement*



* Percent of all children adopted within 24 months of placement into out-of-home care. Based upon federal fiscal year data submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). The federal standard is 32 percent or higher.

OBJECTIVE Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care
MEASURED BY Children placed in guardianships

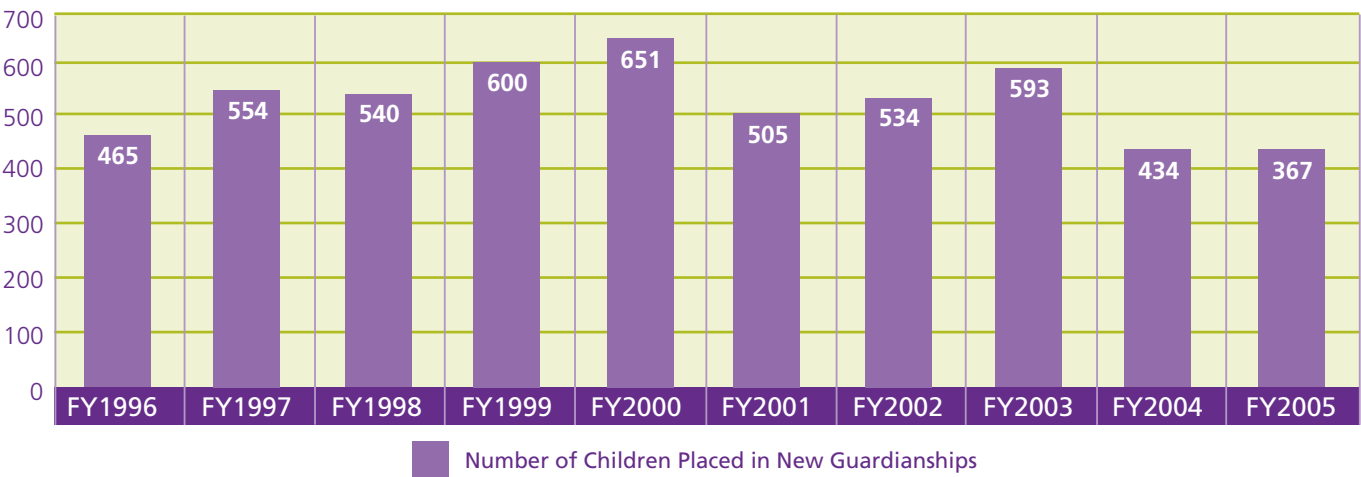


There are children for whom reunification is not possible and adoption may not be in the best interest of the child. These children’s parents may not be able to fully parent them but wish to maintain relationships or they may be older children who have themselves voiced objections to adoption.

In some situations, adoption may be contrary to the mores or beliefs of certain cultural groups. When it is in the best interest of a child to maintain important familial or cultural ties, guardianship may be the best permanency option.

Over the course of the past three years, the number of new guardianships granted has decreased. This is most likely due to the administration’s commitment to pursuing reunifications or adoptions as preferred permanent plans for children whenever possible.

Children Placed in Guardianships*



* Number of children placed in out-of-home care with an accomplished permanent plan of placement in guardianship arrangement granted through either the Superior Court or Juvenile Court system.

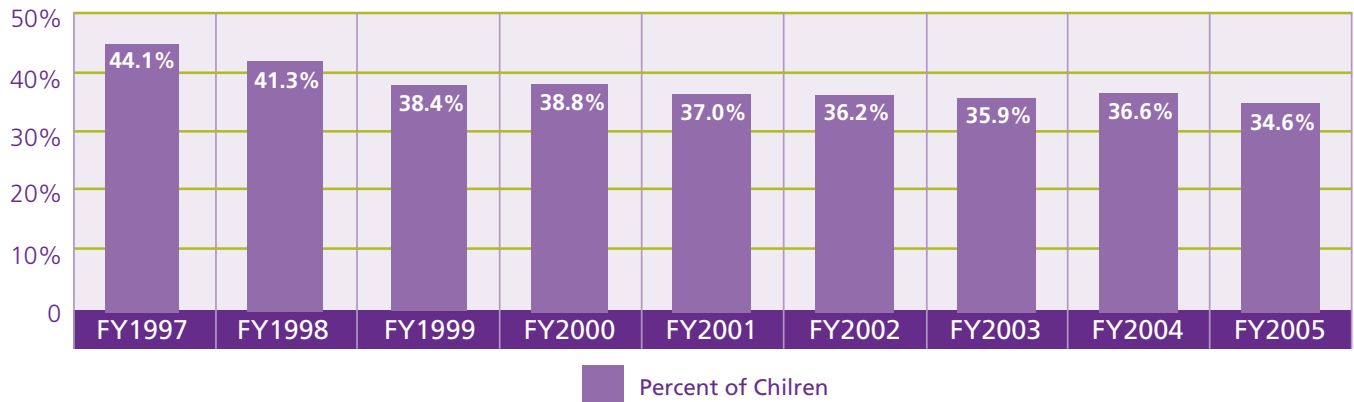
OBJECTIVE Decrease length of stay without increasing re-entry
MEASURED BY Length of stay for children in care

Whenever children must be placed into out-of-home care to provide for their safety, every effort is made to make sure that their temporary placement is stable and that a permanent home is secured as quickly as possible.

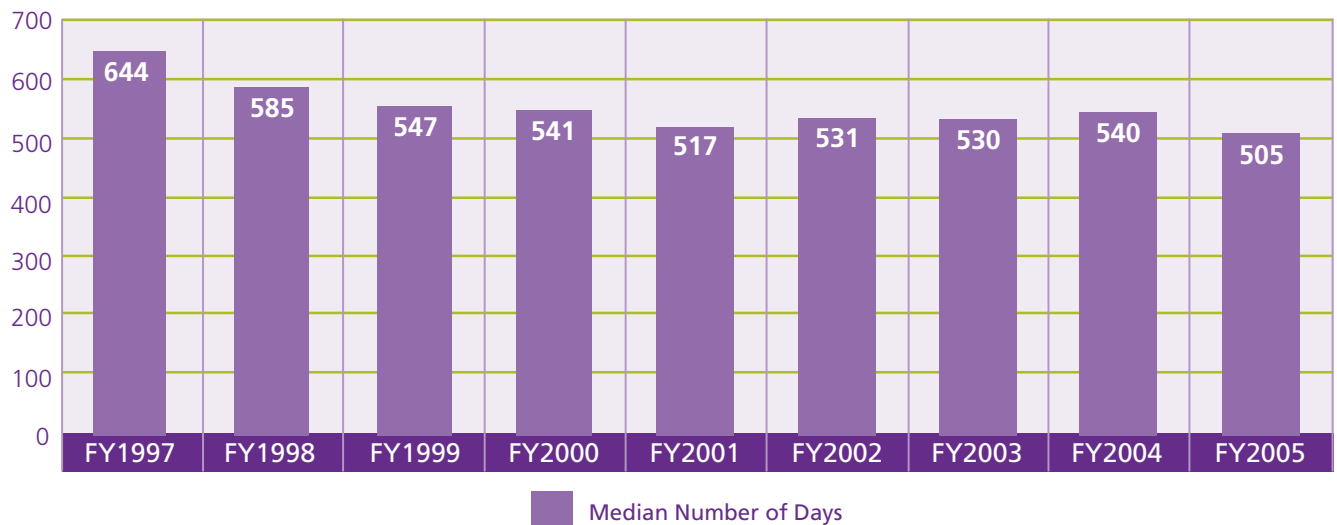
The percent of children who have been in care longer than two years has decreased from 44.1 percent in Fiscal Year 1997 to 34.6 percent in Fiscal Year 2005.

The median number of days children spend in out-of-home care has ranged from a high of 644 days in Fiscal Year 1997 to a low of 505 in the most recent reporting period, Fiscal Year 2005.

Children in Care More than 2 Years*



Median Number of Days Children are Placed in Care*



* Percent of children in CA custody in care for more than 60 days, who have a cumulative time in care during their current placement episode of more than two years.

** Median cumulative time in care for all children in care for more than 60 days.

Note: This measure is calculated based upon the population of children in care for more than 60 days to more clearly depict the status of children for whom the administration is actively conducting permanency planning. Sixty days was the chosen "cut off" point because children who stay in care at least 60 days must have a permanency plan completed at this point. If children who are placed for very short periods were included in this measure of children in care more than two years, it would inaccurately skew the understanding of the percent of children who are placed for much longer periods of time.

OBJECTIVE Decrease length of stay without increasing re-entry
MEASURED BY Children re-entering care

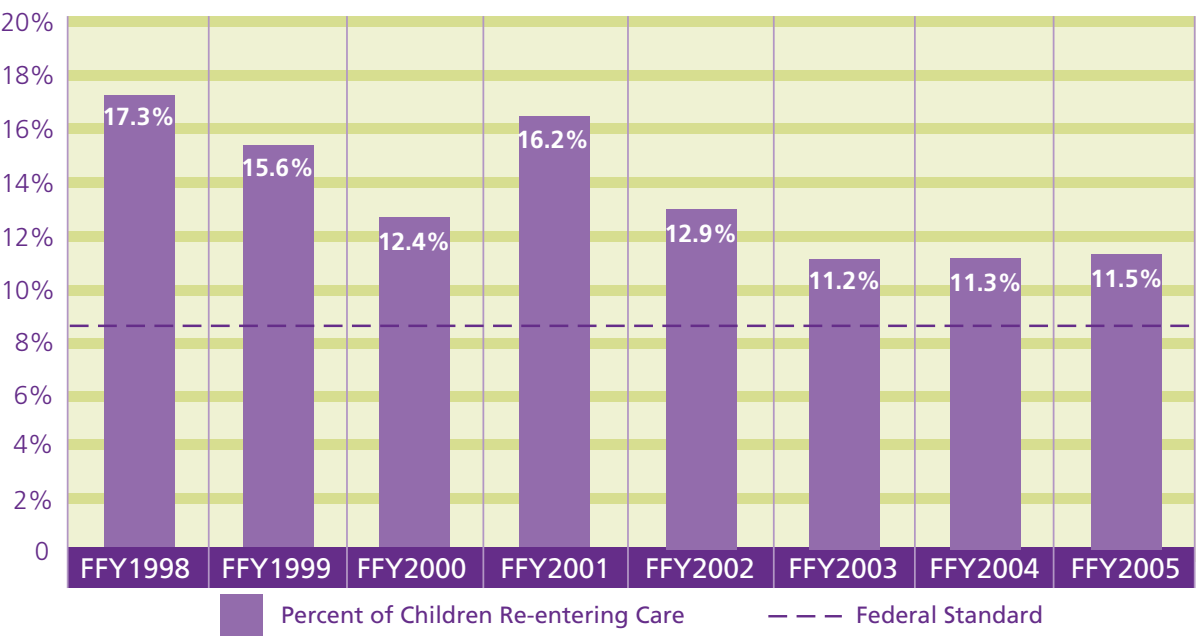
The Children’s Administration seriously considers the decision to remove children from their homes and families. Likewise, the decision to return children home is made with careful consideration and requires the implementation of specific supports and safeguards to see to it that the actions resulting in a child’s removal do not again occur.

Efforts are made to support families so that transition and safety plans are followed and parents are adhering to conditions required to regain custody of their children. Even when great care is taken, there are those children who will again be placed into out-of-home care following reunification with their families due to new allegations of abuse or neglect.

The federal standard states that no more than 8.6 percent of children should re-enter out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification.

Washington State has struggled to meet this standard and has been unable to do so throughout the eight years that this measure has been tracked. Since 2001, progress has been made but the state performance rate still exceeds the federal standard by a considerable margin. The most recent performance showed a decrease from the previous fiscal year.

Children Re-entering Care within 12 Months of Reunification*



* Percent of children who re-enter out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification with their parents, regardless of length of stay. Data included in this chart is based on federal fiscal year data submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). The federal standard is 8.6 percent or less.

OBJECTIVE Increase stability for children in out-of-home care
MEASURED BY Children with no more than two placements

In order for a child to feel safe and secure, he or she must be able to adjust to a new home, recognize the routines, rules, and mores of an environment, and establish relationships.

These kinds of adjustments require time and energy, and each time a child experiences a placement move the process must begin again.

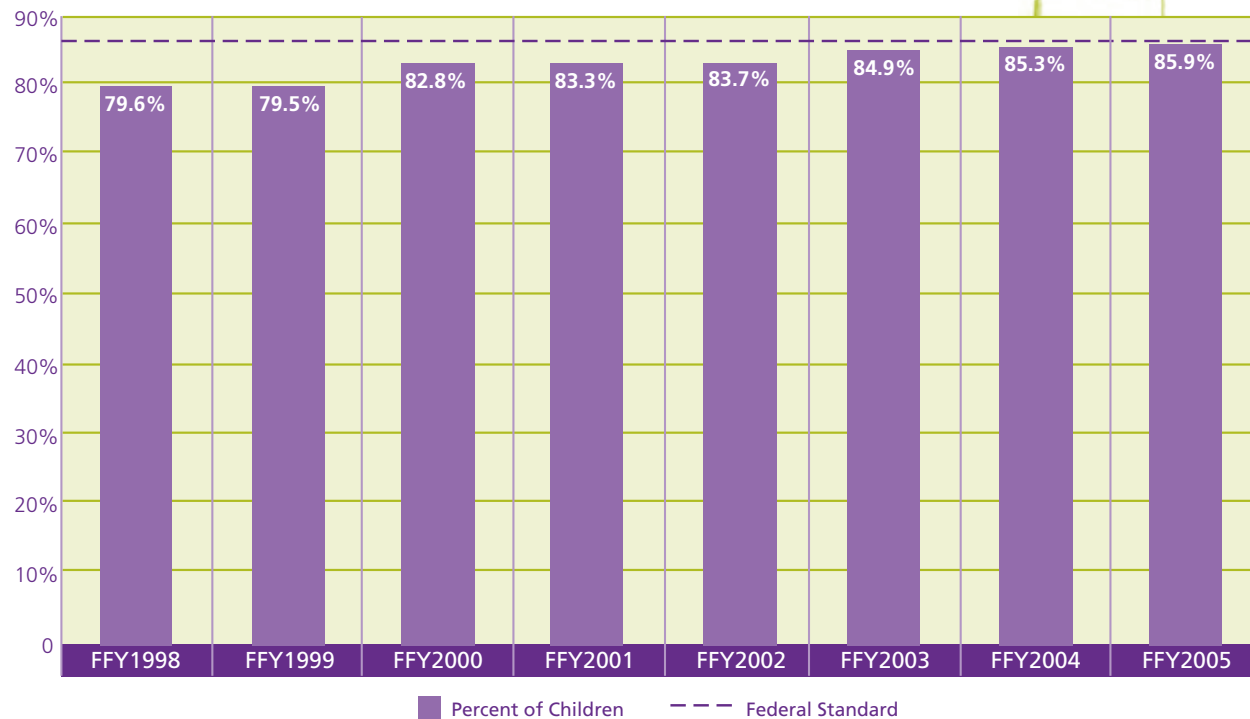
After a time, children who experience multiple placement moves may become frustrated and tired and grow fearful of establishing new relationships, because they have learned that whomever they invest in will be a temporary figure in their lives.

The Children's Administration recognizes how important it is for children to experience stability while in out-of-home placement and has done a good job of moving toward the federal standard of 86.7 percent or more placements will be stable. Over the course of the past eight years, the administration has made progress nearly every year.



Laurel L., Age 8

Children with Two or Fewer Placements*



* Percent of children who have only one or two principle places or homes of residence (placement events) during their first 12 months in care (or exiting from care within 12 months), excluding respite care, hospital stays, on-the-run, and similar types of placements which do not represent a deliberate change of residence. Data included in this chart is based upon federal fiscal year data submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). The federal standard is 86.7 percent or higher.

OBJECTIVE Decrease over-representation of minority children in care
MEASURED BY Minority children in care longer than two years

Throughout Washington State and across the nation, there are disproportionate numbers of African American and Native American children in out-of-home care and they tend to stay in care for longer periods of time than other racial and ethnic groups.

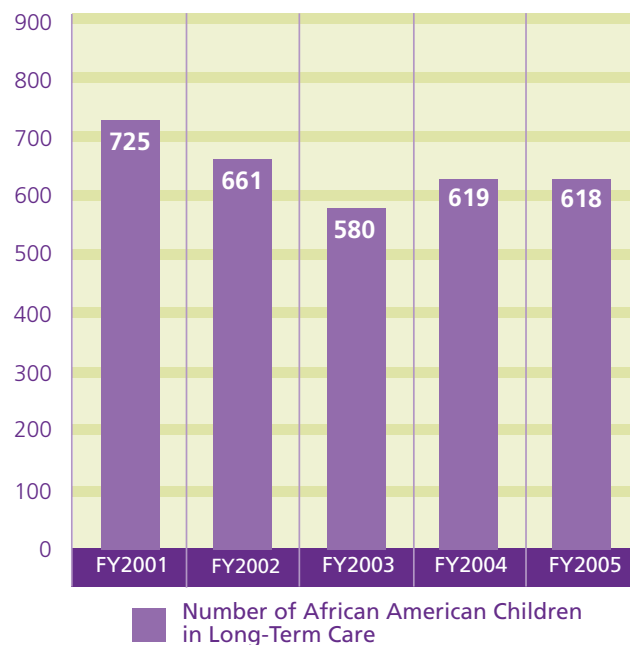
The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) states that, “Nationally African-American children are four times as likely and American Indian children about 3.5 times as likely as white children to be in protective custody.” In addition, CWLA states that nationwide, “Children of color are likely to stay in foster care for longer periods of time and are less likely to be either returned home or adopted.”¹

The Children’s Administration has tracked disproportionality in Washington State since 2001 and established the Office of African American Children’s Services in King County in an effort to address system issues and improve practice with reference to African American children and their families.

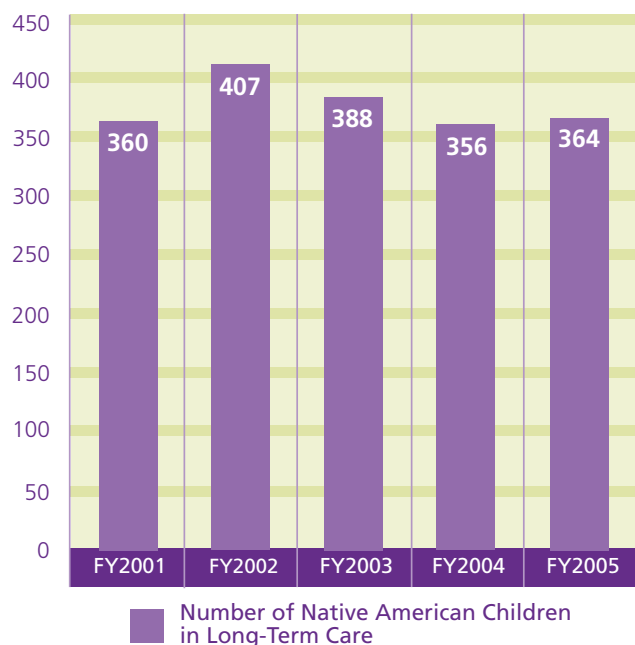
The administration has also worked toward increased consultation and collaboration with tribes statewide, both towards the goal of improving compliance with Indian Child Welfare Act mandates and improving outcomes for Native American children.

In Fiscal Year 2005, the number of African American children in care for longer than two years remained virtually unchanged while the number of Native American children in long-term care increased.

African American Children in Care for More than 2 Years*



Native American Children in Care for More than 2 Years**



¹ Child Welfare League of America, Disproportionality, Facts about Children in Foster Care
www.cwla.org/programs/culture/dsisproportionate.htm

* Number of African American children who have been placed in out-of-home care for two years or longer who are not in their permanent home.

** Number of Native American children whom have been placed in out-of-home care for two years or longer who are not in their permanent home.

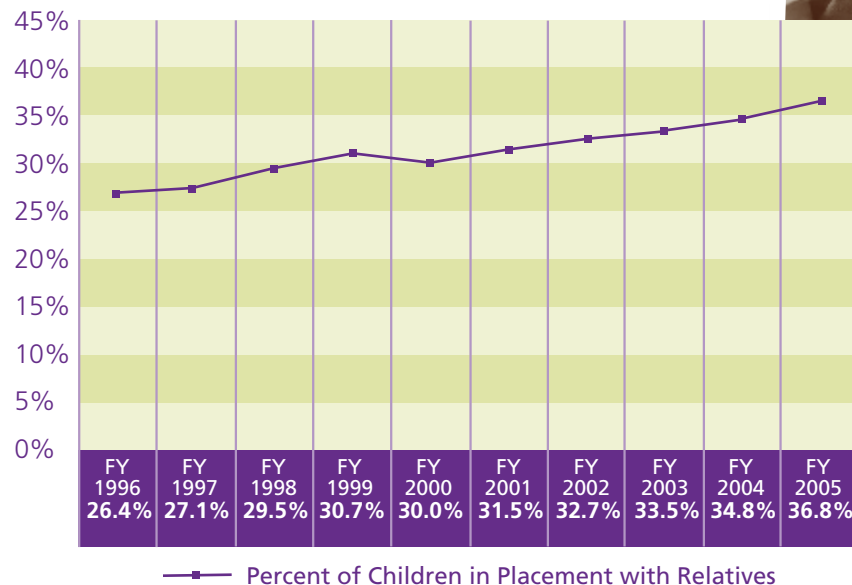
OBJECTIVE Increase relative placements
MEASURED BY Children placed with relatives

Children who must be removed from the homes of their parents due to abuse or neglect often benefit greatly from maintaining ongoing relationships with their extended families of origin. Whenever it is safe and in the best interest of the child, the Children's Administration seeks out extended family members as potential placement options for children who cannot go home temporarily or who require new homes permanently.

The Children's Administration has continually increased the percent of children placed with extended family members from 26.4 percent in June 1996 to 36.8 percent in June 2005.

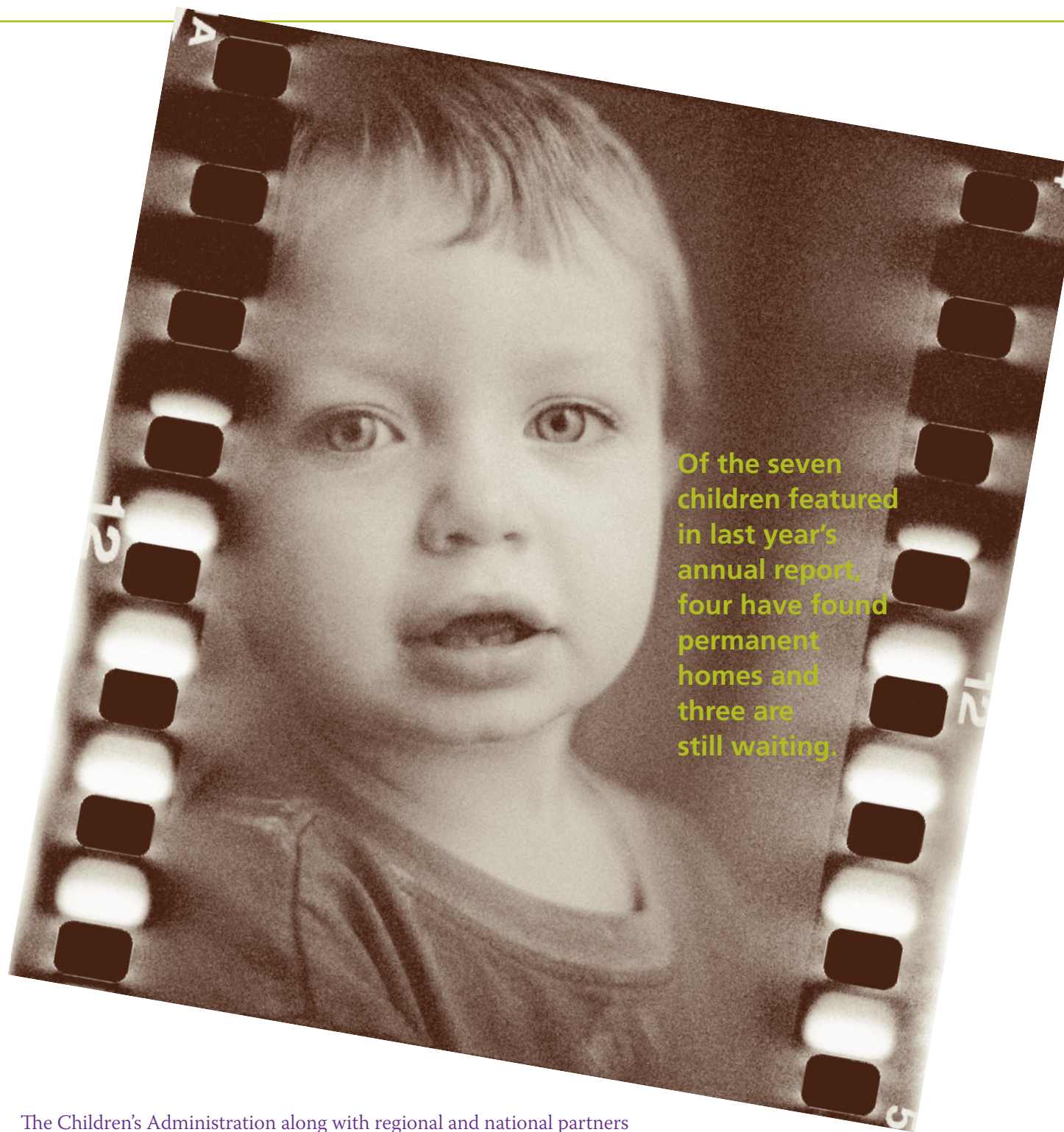


Children in Placement with Relatives*



Danielle W., Age 7

* The percent of children in placement with a relative on the last day of the fiscal year.



Of the seven children featured in last year's annual report, four have found permanent homes and three are still waiting.

The Children's Administration along with regional and national partners are working together to find homes that meet the needs of these and other waiting children. If you are interested in making a difference in the life of a child who is still waiting, please contact one of the organizations listed below.

Washington Adoption Resource Network..... www.nwresource.org/af_ware.htm

Northwest Adoption Exchange..... www.nwae.org

Families Like Ours www.familieslikeours.org

Adopt U.S. Kids..... www.adoptuskids.org

How much time do you suppose we spend waiting?

We wait to get money at the bank and to spend money at the store. We wait for cable installers and contractors to show up "sometime between 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M." We wait in waiting rooms, lines, and we wait in traffic. All that waiting, while inconvenient, is really inconsequential in the grand scheme of things. What if you were waiting for something really important like a transplant organ or news about whether or not a family member was okay amid some tragedy, such as Hurricane Katrina? What if you had to wait to know if you were loved or wanted? How long would you wait to belong? How long would you remain hopeful? Could you wait for a home for a year? Two years? What about seven years?

What if you had to wait a lifetime?

Children in child welfare systems in Washington and throughout the nation wait. They have no choice but to wait and see if one day they can have a family of their very own. They wait to see if they will get to spend an entire school year at just one school. They wonder if they will ever have a room they can decorate just the way they want. They wait and wonder if someone, anyone, will ever love them just the way they are, forever.

Here are a few of the children still waiting for a home and family to call their own.

Daniel is 15 and has been waiting his entire life –

"I want a family soon. I am tired of moving from place to place, so could you please find a nice, caring, loving family for me? I hope you do soon."

Nycole is 12 and has been waiting for a year and a half –

"I don't want to go the rest of my life knowing that I lived with someone I didn't like or that I was unhappy."

Joseph is 11 and has been waiting for three years –

"I've had a tough life and I've learned a lot from life. I have always dreamed about getting adopted ever since I learned that my dad wouldn't take me in."

Christina is 14 and has been waiting for five years –

"I just want to get adopted into a family that loves me and wants me."

Jeff is 12 and has been waiting nearly eight years –

"I am worried that a new family won't know me very well. It will take time. It will take time to see what they're like. It just takes lots of time."

Cyndal is 13 and has been waiting for three years –

"I just hope I get adopted because I really want to have a family"

Gage is 14 and has been waiting half his life –

"I just want a family that will take me no matter what happens. After one bad thing I don't want them to send me back."

* Information about waiting children included on this page is excerpted from the Northwest Adoption Exchange Website.